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Black Sabbath's pioneering lyrical rhetoric: Tragic structure and cathartic potential in song narratives

ABSTRACT

Widely credited with establishing heavy metal, Black Sabbath released their first two albums in 1970, Black Sabbath and Paranoid, and those albums' success signalled a paradigm shift in rock, garnering the band international fame. Although having a self-perception of being a 'heavy underground' band, Black Sabbath would go on to sell more than 75 million albums worldwide. With Black Sabbath having their final tour in 2017, this article examines lyrics contained in a sample of hit songs appearing on Black Sabbath and Paranoid to better understand why the band's songs struck such a responsive chord with listeners. In examining lyrics from Black Sabbath's earliest hits, this article provides a perspective from which the band's songs can be shown as frequently containing the basic elements of Greek tragedy – tragic situation, tragic result, tragic hero and nemesis – a recurring pattern that may have served a cathartic function for listeners. Like Greek tragedies, Black Sabbath's songs involve stories of extreme human suffering, often under extraordinary circumstances, having the ability to elicit emotional responses from audiences. By hearing narratives about the extreme suffering experienced by persons not unlike themselves, listeners are able to participate vicariously in the heroes' fear, pain and grief. Thus, just as Aristotle believed

KEYWORDS

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Greek tragedies induced a catharsis – a purging of negative emotions – in viewers, the author argues that Black Sabbath's lyrical narratives could serve a therapeutic function for listeners.

INTRODUCTION

As folk rock, psychedelic rock and other forms of rock dominated the music scene during the late 1960s hippie era of peace and love in the United States, another rock music subgenre that would come to be known as 'heavy metal' was emerging in the war-ravaged, industrial city of Birmingham, England. The genesis of the heavy metal music subgenre arguably began in 1968 when four working-class kids from Birmingham – John 'Ozzy' Osbourne (vocalist), Tony Iommi (guitarist), Joseph 'Geezer' Butler (bassist) and Bill Ward (drummer) – formed the blues-based rock band Earth Blues Company, which was later shortened to Earth (Black Sabbath n.d.; Bukszpan 2012: 35; Cope 2010: 4–5). Soon, the quartet decided to make songs reflective of the oppressive realities of their low-income, working-class life in Birmingham (Bukszpan 2012: 37) and, consequently, songs darker in terms of subject matter. During their transition, the quartet's songs turned to subjects such as war, death, social chaos, the supernatural and the conflict between good and evil, subject matter which ran counter to the more uplifting and optimistic lyrical themes inherent in many songs synonymous with the hippie era (Bukszpan 2012: 37). Shortly after the quartet's music changed, so too did their name. In 1969, after discovering there was another band named Earth, the quartet changed their name to Black Sabbath, the title of a 1963 horror film starring Boris Karloff (Wall 2014: 41, 44).

Recorded during a single live session in a small recording studio, Black Sabbath's self-titled debut album was released in early 1970 (Black Sabbath n.d.; Bukszpan 2012: 37). Although the album was derided by critics, Black Sabbath's songs struck a responsive chord with youthful audiences, and the band became internationally popular shortly after the album's release (Bukszpan 2012: 37; Wall 2014: 48). Also in 1970, only 7 months after releasing their debut album, Black Sabbath released their second album, *Paranoid*, another quickly done, no-frills recording (Black Sabbath n.d.). Like their self-titled debut album, *Paranoid* was well received by listeners internationally who responded to the band's expanding subject matter. Both *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid* were certified gold (i.e. 500,000 albums sold) the year after their release. Together, *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid* represent powerful albums that pointed rock music in a much harder and heavier direction (Black Sabbath n.d.), a new direction known today as 'heavy metal'.

Although Black Sabbath is widely credited with establishing the heavy metal music genre, the band views themselves as being a 'heavy underground' band since their music was recognized by a network of fans long before critics and the music industry took serious notice. What is more, Black Sabbath's self-view is supported by the fact that, even after selling more than 75 million albums worldwide, the band was not inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame until 2006 despite being eligible for induction since 1995. According to Black Sabbath's official website, the group remains 'one of the most misunderstood bands in rock history' (Black Sabbath n.d.).

With Black Sabbath having their final tour in 2017, this essay examines the band's early hit songs in an effort to better understand why Black Sabbath's

heavy metal songs struck such a responsive chord with listeners. In particular, this essay examines lyrics in a sample of hit songs appearing on the band's first two albums and identifies themes inherent in those songs. In examining lyrics from Black Sabbath's earliest hits, this essay provides a perspective from which the band's songs can be shown as frequently containing the basic elements of Greek tragedy, a recurring pattern that may serve a cathartic function for listeners. As the success of Black Sabbath's first two albums 'marked a paradigm shift in the world of rock' (The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum 2016), this essay lends some insight into why the heavy metal genre has had such success. After all, heavy metal artists such as Metallica, Judas Priest and Iron Maiden have cited Black Sabbath as an influence (The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum 2016), and this influence certainly extends to those bands' lyrical rhetoric.

THE RHETORICAL NATURE OF SONG LYRICS

The rhetorical nature of song has been recognized since Plato warned in his *Republic* that songs could contain messages dangerous to the state (Millsap 2004: 38; Sellnow and Sellnow 2001: 395). Aristotle, a student of Plato, recognized that various art forms imitate life and have the capacity to move audiences including 'verse alone' (Aristotle 1902: 23). In *The Poetics*, Aristotle wrote, 'There is another art which imitates by means of language alone, and that in either prose or verse' (Aristotle 1902: 9). Like Aristotle, scholars of today recognize the rhetorical nature of song, and a growing body of literature examining songs from various genres, including heavy metal, has been developing over the last several decades. Since the seminal texts about the heavy metal genre by Gaines (1991), Weinstein (1991) and Walser (1993), a number of scholars have contributed to the ever-growing body of research in metal studies (e.g. Bayer 2009; Hill and Spracklen 2010; Hjelm et al. 2013; Maguire 2015; Puri 2015; Spracklen et al. 2011; Wallach et al. 2011), including individuals examining heavy metal song lyrics (e.g. Cope 2010; Deanna 2008; Knepp 2013; Littmann 2013; Wall 2014; Weinstein 2000). For example, in examining the lyrical content of heavy metal songs, Weinstein (2000: 38–43) determined that heavy metal songs frequently involve Dionysian themes (i.e. emblematic of the Greek god Dionysus), such as promiscuity and excessive drinking, or themes of chaos, like confusion, destruction, conflict, violence and death.

Examinations of heavy metal song lyrics can better our understanding of the reasons why some heavy metal artists are capable of appealing to a large number of listeners. The lyrics of Black Sabbath songs have been referenced not only in examinations focussed on the band specifically (e.g. Cope 2010; Irwin 2013; Wall 2014) but also on the heavy metal genre generally (e.g. Bukszpan 2012; Deanna 2008; Faulkner 2009; Walser 1993; Weinstein 2000). As explained by Cope (2010: 82–83), the lyrics of Black Sabbath's songs primarily relate to 'Satan, the occult, the supernatural and related phenomena such as suffering and death, the horrors of war, good versus evil, nightmares and fantastic monsters/creatures'. These various lyrical themes are prevalent in songs appearing on Black Sabbath's first two albums, and scholars have commented on the lyrics of those songs, including the five songs examined in this study: 'Black Sabbath' (e.g. Cope 2010; Knepp 2013; Littmann 2013; Wall 2014), 'N.I.B.' (e.g. Cope 2010; Wall 2014), 'War Pigs' (e.g. Cope 2010; Deanna 2008; Littmann 2013; Wall 2014), 'Paranoid' (e.g. Littmann 2013) and 'Iron Man' (e.g. Cope 2010; Littmann 2013; Wall 2014).

At the same time, Black Sabbath's early songs contain themes of chaos, frequently involving subjects such as confusion, destruction, conflict, violence and death. As these same subjects were also frequent themes in Greek tragedy, Black Sabbath's lyrical narratives can be examined with regard to their thematic similarities to Greek tragedy. In his examination of 'Black Sabbath', Knepp (2013: 104) discussed how the song's opening lines are reminiscent of the Greek god Apollo, son of Zeus, who was portrayed as a terrifying deity in Greek tragedies. Similarly, in examining the relationship between Greek tragedy and heavy metal, Deanna (2008) explained how four lines of Black Sabbath's 'War Pigs' resemble verses in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. According to Deanna, listeners to 'War Pigs' can identify with the suffering experienced by the soldiers in the song much like persons can identify with *Agamemnon*'s anti-war theme. In describing the Aristotelian nature of Black Sabbath, Littmann (2013) discussed how the characters embroiled in horrific situations in the songs 'Black Sabbath' and 'Iron Man' are reminiscent of Sophocles' tragic hero King Oedipus. During his discussion, Littmann also theorized that 'Black Sabbath' and 'Iron Man' allow for a purging of negative emotions by engaging listeners' sympathies for the songs' tragic characters and their terrible plights.

TRAGEDY

Tragedy is a form of drama invented in Athens, Greece during antiquity (Scodel 2010: 2). Modern-day notions of tragedy result largely from the survival of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which was written during the mid-fourth century BCE (Before the Common Era) (Billings 2014: 18). In *The Poetics*, Aristotle provided an account of tragedy's effect and constitution that has since influenced practically all philosophical understandings of the genre (Billings 2014: 18). Tragedy engages humans intellectually and emotionally by addressing serious subjects with a particular focus on extreme human suffering brought about wittingly or unwittingly, by unmerited misfortune or by an individual's frailty, ignorance or erroneous decision-making (Aristotle 1902; Scodel 2010: 17). In expressing thoughts and feelings held by individuals encountering extreme suffering, a tragedy functions to arouse feelings of pity and fear in audiences (Aristotle 1902). The degree to which tragedy arouses pity and fear in audiences is related to the extent to which individual audience members can relate to the characters and sympathize with their plights. As Aristotle (1902: 53) wrote in *The Poetics*, a 'character must be true to life'.

However, what Aristotle deemed most essential was the tragic effect itself, something not achieved simply through audience identification with characters per se (Hamburger 1969: 3) but rather through the ability to elicit emotional responses from the audience. Because many Greek tragedies involved extraordinary situations beyond the realm of normalcy, it becomes clear that audiences were being required to interpret tragedies in a broader sense by the 'tragedians', the authors of the Greek tragedies (Hamburger 1969: 4–5). As Vickers (1973: 52) writes: 'Greek tragedy is essentially a representation of human suffering, and of the causes and effects of it; and ... this suffering produces in humane characters or in humane spectators the feeling of sympathy for the sufferer'. Thus, even when the characters in Greek tragedies are embroiled in extraordinary situations, which audience members could not have possibly experienced, audiences can nevertheless appreciate the suffering of those characters and be moved to sympathy. Indeed, the interpretative openness inherent in Greek tragic situations and the re-applicability

of those circumstances in ever-changing times could explain why tragedies have survived so many centuries later.

Along with engaging humans intellectually and emotionally, Aristotle is purported to have believed that the task of tragedy was to induce an emotional 'catharsis', a purging of the emotions of pity and fear in the viewer, thereby producing in him/her a mood of peacefulness (Copeland and Slater 1985; Scodel 2010: 7–8). In discussing catharsis, Aristotle (1902: 23) wrote in *The Poetics*, 'through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions'. Within the context of *The Poetics*, Aristotle's statement suggests that tragedy's arousal of pity and fear helps effectuate a catharsis of those same emotions in audience members who in turn feel more at peace. In feeling sympathy for characters experiencing extreme suffering, individual audience members can recognize that their own situations are vastly better and, as a result, rid themselves, if only temporarily, of self-pity and personal fear. Thus, Aristotle's statement regarding the emotional catharsis that can be brought about by viewing tragedy might well be reconstituted as follows: 'Through the arousal of pity and fear for the tragic character experiencing extreme suffering, tragedy allows spectators to purge themselves of the emotions of self-pity and fear for oneself'.

If the task of tragedy is to induce an emotional catharsis by eliciting feelings of pity and fear in viewers, tragedies then need to fulfill certain requirements in order to provoke those specific emotional responses. Aristotle believed every tragedy must involve six parts: (1) plot – the arrangement of events in the play, (2) character – an agent of action (e.g. hero, heroine, nemesis) in the play, (3) thought – characters' expression of their thoughts and feelings during plot development, (4) diction – characters' word choice in expressing their thoughts and feelings, (5) spectacle – the on-stage theatrical components of the play (e.g. costumes, scenery) and (6) song – musical compositions incorporated into the play (Aristotle 1902: 27–31). Aristotle considered plot to be the first and foremost principle in tragedy, followed in importance by the five other principles in the order listed above (Aristotle 1902: 27–31). Aristotle arranged these six elements of tragedy under the major categories of 'object' (plot, character and thought), 'medium' (diction and song) and 'manner' (spectacle) (Aristotle 1902: 23–25).

According to Aristotle, the plot – as the first and foremost principle in tragedy – needs to be well structured with a beginning, middle and end (Aristotle 1902: 31). What is more, Aristotle believed the plot of a tragedy should be constructed in such a way that it would indeed provoke feelings of pity and fear in audiences (Aristotle 1902: 45). For example, Aristotle argued that virtuous characters should not pass from prosperity to adversity nor should bad characters pass from adversity to prosperity, because while these circumstances may arouse emotions (e.g. shock) in audiences, they would not arouse the specific emotions of pity and fear (Aristotle 1902: 45). Aristotle also argued a tragic character's change of fortune should go from good to bad, not vice versa, and this change for the worse should result from the character's frailty or erroneous decision-making rather than vice or depravity (Aristotle 1902: 45), circumstances having the potential to elicit pity and fear in audiences. Moreover, Aristotle asserted that the arousal of pity and fear in audiences could be brought about by spectacular means to create a sense of the terrible, such as having family members kill one another (Aristotle 1902: 49–51). In sum, Aristotle believed that tragedy should be constructed in a way that elicits the specific emotions of pity and fear in audiences, and according to catharsis theory, the greater the emotional arousal the better for it helps produce a greater emotional release in those audiences.

HEAVY METAL'S CATHARTIC POTENTIAL

Aristotle's reference in *The Poetics* to the concept of an emotional catharsis being brought about by exposure to Greek tragedy has generated a lot of scholarly intrigue. In modern times, the concept of emotional catharsis has been viewed more broadly as applying to the reduction of any negative feelings (e.g. anger, aggression, self-destructive impulses), not just emotions of pity and fear. In a study of adolescent male fans of the genre, Arnett (1996: 19) found heavy metal songs serve a cathartic function by helping listeners purge destructive and self-destructive impulses. In a more recent study, which involved 39 males, aged 18 to 34, exposed to 'extreme music', including heavy metal, Sharman and Dingle (2015) found that listening to such music appeared to result in an increase in positive emotions in listeners. What is more, Sharman and Dingle also found listening to metal music relaxed listeners as effectively as sitting in silence. Since Sharman and Dingle's study involved songs from various heavy metal artists (e.g. Megadeth, Metallica, Judas Priest, System of a Down), the study provides strong support for the cathartic effects of listening to heavy metal.

The cathartic function of heavy metal songs may be largely attributable to their lyrical narratives, especially when those narratives include a tragic structure. The present examination contributes to the growing body of literature on the cathartic function of heavy metal, and heavy metal lyrics particularly, by examining songwriters' use of the basic elements of Greek tragedy in song narratives. Expanding on previous examinations of heavy metal song lyrics, this essay demonstrates that the lyrical narratives of Black Sabbath's early hit songs consistently incorporate the basic elements of Greek tragedy, a recurring pattern suggesting that the songs may serve a cathartic function for listeners. In addition to rhetorically analysing each song, the author also discusses how the songs' lyrical narratives are much like characters, themes or situations often found in Greek tragedies. Thus, just as Aristotle believed Greek tragedies played out on stage induced a catharsis – a purging of negative emotions – in viewers, the author argues the lyrical narratives of Black Sabbath's early hit songs could serve a cathartic function for listeners, something which may have contributed significantly to the band's success.

METHOD

In examining how heavy metal songs operate rhetorically, a logical starting point is an examination of the rhetorical nature of hit songs produced by Black Sabbath, the band widely credited with ushering in the heavy metal genre. Since Black Sabbath's first two albums, *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid*, arguably represent the genesis of heavy metal music, this analysis focuses on hit songs appearing on these albums. Analysis was specifically focussed on hit songs, those accepted by the largest audiences, because hit songs serve as useful indicators of what themes Black Sabbath fans gravitate towards. What is more, when a 2013 *Rolling Stone* reader's poll asked what were the top ten greatest Black Sabbath hits, fans selected six songs from the first two albums in the band's nineteen-album discography of studio recordings (Greene 2013). Of those six Black Sabbath hits selected by fans, all but one ('The Wizard') contains a basic tragic structure. Thus, this essay examines five of Black Sabbath's hit songs, two ('Black Sabbath', 'N.I.B.') from the band's self-titled debut album and three ('Iron Man', 'Paranoid', 'War Pigs') from the band's follow-up album, *Paranoid*.

Instructed by Aristotle's categorization of the elements of tragedy, this examination is focussed on the elements included in the 'object' category (plot, character and thought). Aristotle's category of 'medium', which includes the tragic elements of diction and song, is inherently addressed as this study examines lyrics (element of diction) contained in a sample of songs (element of song). Aristotle's category of 'manner' is not a consideration in this study as it involves the tragic element of 'spectacle', visual components of a play (e.g. costumes, scenery), which are irrelevant to an examination of song.

Plot will be examined in terms of a 'tragic situation' and a 'tragic result'. The tragic situation can be regarded as a predicament in which the character(s) is deprived of outward assistance and must be self-reliant, whereas the tragic result can be regarded as the suffering experienced by the character(s). The tragic element of character will be examined in terms of a 'tragic hero' and a 'nemesis'. The tragic hero, a term which for the sake of simplicity will be used even in those cases where a heroine may be involved, can be regarded as a main character(s) suffering misfortune or facing unfortunate circumstances brought about by a nemesis. The tragic hero's suffering can be brought about wittingly or unwittingly, through unwarranted adversity or by means of personal weakness, ignorance or mistake. The nemesis can be regarded as any entity creating the tragic hero's suffering or unable/unwilling to alleviate the suffering. The nemesis can create suffering for the tragic hero by being inattentive, ineffective, unethical, irreligious or violative of other established doctrine. Discussion relating to characters' thoughts and feelings regarding their tragic situation will reveal the element of 'thought' contained within the sampled songs.

For the purposes of this analysis, some aspects of Greek tragedy have been generalized. As an example, the tragic hero is simply regarded as any individual who has found himself/herself in a struggle with a nemesis. The individual does not necessarily have to arrive at his/her untimely end. Thus, the tragic result does not necessarily have to involve death. The tragic result may also include an indefinite confinement in the tragic situation, a purgatory of sorts, which some would argue is a fate worse than death. Also, the tragic hero need not be of noble descent but instead may be an ordinary person, a person with whom listeners are more likely to identify.

Black Sabbath

On 13 February 1970, Black Sabbath released their self-titled debut album. The tracks on the album, which was befittingly released on a 'Friday-the-thirteenth', revealed the band's new-found interest in examining issues relating to evil, death, wickedness and the supernatural. *Black Sabbath* has been recognized as the foundational album in the genesis of the heavy metal genre (Wall 2014: 48). As renowned heavy metal author Mick Wall (2014: 49) writes, 'What Sabbath achieved on their first album wasn't just heavy, it was monumental; game changing.... it would become the Dead Sea Scrolls of hard rock and heavy metal'. *Black Sabbath* includes two songs from the population of study containing the essential elements of Greek tragedy.

Black Sabbath

In 'Black Sabbath' (Black Sabbath 1970a), the first track on the band's self-titled debut album, the tragic hero, simply referred to as 'me', narrates the story and can be read as a mortal person, male or female, given the story's

context. According to the song's narrative, a 'figure in black' appears and points towards the tragic hero. The nemesis, described as a 'big black shape with eyes of fire', is identified as 'Satan'. The tragic situation involves the tragic hero trying to escape death upon realizing he/she is Satan's 'chosen one'. Although inconclusive, the listener is left to assume the tragic result is that the hero's life is taken by Satan, when the song closes with: 'Is it the end, my friend?/Satan's coming 'round the bend/People running 'cause they're scared/The people better go and beware!/No, no, please, no!'.

Like many Greek tragedies, 'Black Sabbath' deals with mortality, one of the most central issues of human existence. Merely mortal and too weak to fight Satan, the tragic hero realizes he/she is mismatched in a struggle with fate. The hero's vulnerability is made all the more apparent through repeated cries, such as 'Oh no!' and 'Oh no, no, Please God help me!'. Moreover, the tragic situation in 'Black Sabbath' centres around the tragic hero's awareness that he/she is ill-fated and perhaps unable to avert this fate, a predicament often found in Greek tragedy.

With an acute awareness of what tragic result awaits, the tragic hero of 'Black Sabbath' is similar to Sophocles' tragic hero in *Oedipus the King*. Whereas the tragic hero of 'Black Sabbath' becomes aware death awaits him/her through an encounter with Satan, King Oedipus foresaw his tragic fate through a prophecy foretelling he would murder his father and have an incestuous relationship with his mother. Embroiled in their tragic situations, the tragic hero of 'Black Sabbath' and King Oedipus attempt to avoid tragic results by praying or fleeing. Ironically, King Oedipus's decision to flee his homeland to avoid his tragic fate was exactly what would put him, a person unaware he had been fostered, on the course to unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy.

Although the narrative of 'Black Sabbath' prompts a notion that the tragic hero will meet an untimely end, no definitive conclusion is forthcoming, thereby leaving open the possibility, albeit small, the tragic hero has escaped death. With this uncertain ending, listeners to 'Black Sabbath' are offered a ray of optimism as it relates to the tragic hero ultimately overcoming evil. What is more, 'Black Sabbath' is immediately followed by 'The Wizard' (Black Sabbath 1970e) in which listeners are assured good will ultimately reign supreme: 'Evil power disappears/Demons worry when the wizard is near/He turns tears into joy/Everyone's happy when the wizard walks by'. Thus, 'The Wizard' serves as a sort of optimistic denouement to the tragic narrative of 'Black Sabbath'.

N.I.B.

The essential elements of Greek tragedy also appear in the song 'N.I.B.' (Black Sabbath 1970c), which is generally regarded as initials for 'Nativity in Black'. The fourth track on Black Sabbath's self-titled debut album, 'N.I.B.', deals with a mortal person's encounter with a nemesis referred to as 'Lucifer' in the song. Serving as the story's narrator, Lucifer repeatedly tempts the tragic hero with promises of 'love'. Within the song, Lucifer pledges, 'Some people say my love cannot be true/Please believe me, my love, and I'll show you'. The tragic situation involves Lucifer's manipulations to place the tragic hero under his control, something articulated twice in the song: 'Now I have you with me, under my power/Our love grows stronger now with every hour/Look into my eyes, you'll see who I am/My name is Lucifer, please take my hand'.

Like 'Black Sabbath', the theme of 'N.I.B.' is one prevalent in many Greek tragedies – how human weakness, ignorance or error may cause individuals to

suffer a tragic fate. Realizing humans have been warned of the disastrous fate (i.e. eternal damnation) befalling those who would follow him, Lucifer repeatedly tries to tempt the tragic hero with the promise of great rewards should the tragic hero take his hand. The song opens with Lucifer promising, 'I will give you those things you thought unreal/The sun, the moon, the stars all bear my seal'. Afterwards, Lucifer twice assures the tragic hero, 'Follow me now and you will not regret/Leaving the life you led before we met'.

The narrative of 'N.I.B.' portrays a tragic situation paralleling the circumstances of Cassandra, princess of Troy, in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* – both involve tragic situations wherein unearthly forces are trying to win the love of a mortal with promises of great rewards. Whereas the nemesis Lucifer in 'N.I.B.' attempts to win the love of a mortal person with promises of unimaginable gifts (i.e. sun, moon, stars), the god Apollo attempts to win the attentions of Cassandra by promising her the gift of prophecy. Although Cassandra accepted Apollo's gift, she later rejected his advances, a decision that would cause her to suffer a tragic fate. Angered by her rejection, Apollo cursed Cassandra with the inability to convince others of her prophecies, including her prophecy of Troy's demise during the Trojan War.

Unlike the story of Cassandra, however, the lyrical narrative of 'N.I.B.' does not progress to a conclusive tragic result. As with the narrative of 'Black Sabbath', there is no definitive conclusion in 'N.I.B.' as to whether the tragic hero has met a disastrous fate at the hands of Lucifer. The song closes with Lucifer still coaxing, 'please take my hand', but the listener is not told if the tragic hero succumbs to Lucifer by taking his hand. With this indefinite conclusion, listeners to 'N.I.B.' are offered a ray of optimism that perhaps the tragic hero has eluded eternal damnation.

Paranoid

The essential elements of Greek tragedy appear once again in hits on Black Sabbath's second album, *Paranoid*. Released 18 September 1970, amidst the Vietnam War, *Paranoid* had a discernible anti-war tone, something which perhaps fuelled album sales. The anti-war theme of the track 'War Pigs', lyrically inspired by Black Sabbath's conversations with American military personnel based in Germany during the Vietnam War, spoke directly to those young Americans facing draft duty in Vietnam (Wall 2014: 67–68). Indeed, *War Pigs* was the proposed title of the album, but Black Sabbath opted for *Paranoid* fearing backlash from American record chains for an album title critically referencing the Vietnam War (Wall 2014: 70–71). Generally regarded as the band's quintessential album (Black Sabbath n.d.), *Paranoid* has three songs from the population of study containing the essential elements of Greek tragedy.

War Pigs

The opening track on *Paranoid*, 'War Pigs' (Black Sabbath 1970f), could be regarded as the band's lyrical masterpiece. In 'War Pigs', the nemesis is a collective body referred to as 'the war machine', comprised of a combination of individuals who are non-affectionately dubbed 'war pigs' – the 'politicians' who 'started the war' and the 'generals' who 'plot destruction' and serve as 'sorcerers of death's construction'. The tragic heroes in the song are 'the poor' who have no choice but to do the war machine's bidding. The evil nature of the nemesis and the weakness of the tragic heroes are reflected in the lines: 'Time will tell

on their power minds/Making war just for fun/Treating people just like pawns in chess/Wait 'till their judgment day comes, yeah!'

'War Pigs' suggests that because of their status within society, the poor found themselves required to submit to military service, which is likely to result in mass loss of life, something twice referenced within the song as 'the bodies burning'. Like 'War Pigs', the tragedies authored by Aeschylus (e.g. *Agamemnon*, *The Persians*), Euripides (e.g. *The Trojan Women*) and Sophocles (e.g. *Aias*, *Philoctetes*) frequently involve themes of war. Moreover, as with some Greek tragedies, 'War Pigs' describes how individuals' unfortunate fates are oftentimes predetermined because of their statuses within society. Arguably, parallels to the anti-war theme of 'War Pigs' are most evident in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. In the tragedy *The Trojan Women*, the audience not only learns of the Greek's toppling of Troy during the Trojan War but also hears the woeful tales of Troy's women enslaved and children murdered against the backdrop of a mangled, burning city. Like Greek tragedy, 'War Pigs' reminds listeners that human suffering is not always brought about by unearthly forces but can also be inflicted by other humans.

Although the evil entities in 'War Pigs' are triumphant over the tragic heroes in the earthly realm, listeners are assured that those entities will eventually have to answer for their crimes in the afterlife: 'No more war pigs have the power/Hand of God has struck the hour/Day of judgment, God is calling/On their knees, the war pigs crawling/Begging mercy for their sins/Satan, laughing, spreads his wings'. Thus, 'War Pigs' ultimately ends on a message wherein listeners are reassured powerful members of society will have to answer for the suffering they have inflicted on their less powerful mortal counterparts, a message sometimes found in Greek tragedy. Much like 'War Pigs' predicts that the triumphant 'war machine' will be punished by unearthly forces in the afterlife, *The Trojan Women* foretells of the punishment to befall the triumphant Greek army for their overindulgent plundering of Troy. With assistance from Zeus and Poseidon to wreak havoc upon the Aegean Sea, Athena contrived an untimely end for the Greek fleet on what should have been their triumphant voyage home.

Paranoid

In the self-titled opening track on *Paranoid* (Black Sabbath 1970d), the tragic situation involves the anguish experienced by the tragic hero while in a state of mental turmoil. The tragic hero, who can be read as a male in the context of the song, provides the first-person narration. As in 'Black Sabbath', the tragic hero in 'Paranoid' repeatedly articulates the suffering he is experiencing with statements like 'I am frowning all the time', 'I can't see the things that make true happiness' and 'Happiness I cannot feel and love to me is so unreal'. Succumbing to his tumultuous mental state, the tragic hero begins to obsess about losing his mind: 'All day long I think of things but nothing seems to satisfy/Think I'll lose my mind if I don't find something to pacify'. Unable to remedy his tragic situation on his own, the tragic hero makes repeated pleas for assistance, such as 'can you help me occupy my brain?' and 'I need someone to show me the things in life that I can't find'. Despite the tragic hero's repeated pleas for assistance, no one is able to help alleviate his mental anguish, and consequently, the tragic hero views others as his nemeses. As an example, in the opening lines of the song, the tragic hero states, 'Finished with my woman 'cause she couldn't help me with my mind'. In the song's closing,

the tragic hero tells listeners his tragic result, 'I tell you to enjoy life, I wish I could but it's too late'.

The plight of the tragic hero in 'Paranoid' is synonymous with the universal theme of mental affliction and suffering permeating Greek tragedy. Oftentimes in Greek tragedy, mental affliction is a tragic result stemming from the tragic hero's situation, such as the mental affliction of Sophocles' tragic hero King Oedipus. Upon realizing that he had unwittingly fulfilled his dreadful prophesized fate (i.e. killed his father, committed incest with his mother), Oedipus became so mentally distraught he gouged out his eyes. However, in many Greek tragedies, mental affliction is a tragic situation directly inflicted upon the tragic hero, from which tragic results may occur. For example, in Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus, angered at Thebians' refusal to acknowledge him as Zeus's son, inflicted ritual madness upon every woman of Thebes. Believing themselves to be brave huntresses in their frenzied state, the Thebian women, including King Pentheus' mother Agave, killed and dismembered Pentheus after mistaking him for a lion. Upon regaining her mental faculties, Agave realized that she had assisted in butchering her own son, making her a tragic hero in her own right for having to endure such a tragic consequence of her temporary mental affliction. What is more, the irreversible suffering Agave experienced following her son's tragic death is reminiscent of the irremediable mental anguish the tragic hero in 'Paranoid' suffers as he surrenders to his tragic situation and gives up on life.

Like other Black Sabbath songs examined in this essay, 'Paranoid' has as its tragic hero an ordinary person facing an adverse situation he is too weak to overcome. Adding to the tragic hero's suffering is his realization that other individuals are unable or unwilling to alleviate his mental anguish. Although the tragic hero is not facing death or damnation as in many Greek tragedies, the prospect of further devolving into a state of insanity is one of the most tragic results a human being could endure. What is more, unlike other songs examined in this essay, 'Paranoid' does not offer a ray of optimism that the tragic hero will be able to ultimately overcome his tragic situation. However, an awareness of the tragedy experienced by the tragic hero alone helps enlarge listeners' sympathies and make them more grateful about their own good luck (Scodel 2010: 17).

Iron Man

The essential elements of Greek tragedy also appear in 'Iron Man' (Black Sabbath 1970b), the fourth track on *Paranoid*. Rich in metaphor, 'Iron Man' is arguably the most tragic of the sampled songs. The song's tragic hero, Iron Man, travelled time 'for the future of mankind', suggesting that he saved human lives as a result of his journey. However, during his journey, Iron Man experienced a life-altering transformation in which 'he was turned to steel' in a 'great magnetic field', a transformation that causes society to view Iron Man as an oddity rather than as a hero upon his return. Observing Iron Man in his altered state, members of society ask: 'Has he lost his mind?/Can he see or is he blind?/Can he walk at all, or if he moves will he fall?'. Consequently, society, which can be viewed as the nemesis in the song, is indifferent to Iron Man, an indifference that is clearly articulated in the following passage: 'Is he alive or dead?/Has he thoughts within his head?/We'll just pass him there/Why should we even care?'. Later in the song, listeners learn that society has shunned the tragic hero: 'Nobody wants him/They just turn their heads/

Nobody helps him'. Faced with the tragic situation of having been abandoned by society as a result of his life-altering transformation, Iron Man becomes a societal outcast, a tragic result symbolized through the use of the term 'the grave' in the song. Forsaken by those he had saved, Iron Man seeks 'vengeance from the grave' and 'kills the people he once saved'.

Using spectacular means to elicit emotions of both pity and fear, 'Iron Man' epitomizes tragedy as Aristotle believed it should be constructed. To begin, Iron Man heroically saved human beings as a result of his journey, but because of unmerited misfortune, he was reduced to a tragic hero. Then, in an ironic twist of fate, Iron Man was abandoned by the very society he had purportedly saved, and as a result, he became dead to society. Similar to 'War Pigs', 'Iron Man' concludes by telling listeners mortal nemeses will eventually have to answer for the suffering they have imposed on their mortal counterparts. In 'Iron Man', however, it is the tragic hero who metes out retribution and in so doing loses his own humanity, yet another tragic result that is often examined in Greek tragedy (Scodel 2010: 16).

Among Black Sabbath's most tragic narratives, 'Iron Man' has many parallels with Euripides' *Medea*. Although Euripides' tragic heroine Medea is not a wholly likable character because of her cunning and manipulative nature, her tragic situation mirrors the plight of Iron Man. In two terrible twists of fate, both Iron Man and Medea were callously abandoned by the very persons for whom they made sacrifices. Certainly, Iron Man's sacrifices for the future of a society which in turn abandoned him are comparable to Medea's sacrifices (i.e. left her family and her homeland, committed fratricide) for a husband who in turn abandoned her and their children to marry a princess. Also, both Iron Man and Medea are tragically altered as a result of their situations and, consequently, become objects more to be feared than to be pitied. Just as Iron Man lost his humanity by perpetrating murderous revenge against a society forsaking him, Medea exacted revenge against her ex-husband not only by poisoning his new bride but also by killing her own sons, an act of ultimate vengeance.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In examining a sample of hit songs from Black Sabbath's first two albums, this essay demonstrates that the songs contain the essential elements of Greek tragedy: tragic situation, tragic result, tragic hero and nemesis. Like Greek tragedies, Black Sabbath's heavy metal songs involve tragic situations (e.g. abandonment, impending death, mental health concerns) and tragic results (e.g. untimely death, eternal damnation, loss of mental faculties). In all but one of the songs, the tragic heroes are ordinary people, persons with whom listeners can identify; and in all songs, the misfortunes befalling the tragic heroes are ones having the capacity to produce feelings of sympathy in listeners. As ordinary people, the protagonists in these songs sometimes face tragic situations they are unable to overcome. Even in the song 'Iron Man', where the tragic hero is extraordinary in his time travel and composition, the song's protagonist faces abandonment, a misfortune that can befall ordinary persons. Thus, like Greek tragedies, the narratives contained in the sampled Black Sabbath songs are able to elicit in listeners emotional responses to the tragic hero's extreme suffering. Also like Greek tragedies, the lyrical narratives of Black Sabbath's songs involve human suffering inflicted by the actions of unearthly forces (e.g. Satan) or humans themselves (e.g. politicians, military leaders, society).

In possessing the essential elements of Greek tragedy, the Black Sabbath songs examined in this essay may serve a cathartic function for listeners by enabling them to vent their real-life frustrations. While hearing songs about the extreme suffering experienced by persons not unlike themselves, listeners to the lyrical narratives of the Black Sabbath songs examined in this essay are able to participate vicariously in the heroes' fear, pain and grief. By recognizing the tragic hero's suffering, persons listening to the sampled songs might be able to purge themselves of negative emotions, an emotional catharsis similar to that which Aristotle purportedly believed Greek tragedies could induce in viewers.

Like some Greek tragedies, the tragedies in the Black Sabbath songs examined in this essay do not typically conclude upon a wholly negative note. Excepting the song 'Paranoid', the sampled songs either ended inconclusively, providing an optimistic ray of hope, albeit small, that the tragic hero will ultimately avoid a tragic fate (i.e. 'Black Sabbath', 'N.I.B.'), or ended conclusively, explaining that the song's nemeses will eventually pay consequences for the suffering they have imposed on the tragic heroes (i.e. 'War Pigs', 'Iron Man'). Even when listening to tragedies playing out in songs like 'Paranoid' where the narrative ends on a pessimistic note, listeners can have their sympathies enlarged, and they can become more grateful about their own good fortune, a gratefulness that is certainly therapeutic.

The catharsis hypothesis has a long history, first being described by Aristotle when he defined tragedy in *The Poetics* (Gentile 2013: 492–96). In the early part of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud adapted the catharsis hypothesis for use in psychological therapy (Gentile 2013: 492). Starting in the middle part of the twentieth century, researchers (Feshbach 1961; Siegel 1956) began to apply Aristotle's catharsis hypothesis to test the effects of viewing mediated violence. While some early research appeared to support Aristotle's catharsis hypothesis (Feshbach 1961; Feshbach and Singer 1971), later studies cast doubt on the validity of those findings, and decades of subsequent research into the potential cathartic effects of viewing mediated violence in film and television has failed to generate any real support for Aristotle's theory (Gentile 2013: 499). Perhaps, this is because modern mediated violence does not engage the proper emotions to achieve catharsis (Gentile 2013: 499).

Conversely, recent research (Sharman and Dingle 2015) into the potential therapeutic effects of listening to songs, and heavy metal songs in particular, has generated support for the catharsis theory. It may well be that song, including heavy metal, has greater cathartic potential than that which is visually predetermined, such as film or television, precisely because song requires greater emotional involvement on the part of listeners to construct imagery in their heads from the lyrical narratives provided to them. As Lippmann (1922: 3) suggested, people can create 'pictures in their heads' after being exposed to verbal messages. Thus, it is conceivable that upon hearing tragedy played out in the lyrical narratives of song, listeners create mental 'pictures' of tragic situations and characters. Moreover, since listeners inevitably construct these mental 'pictures' based on their own life experiences, the tragedies played out in song lyrics may even be easier for the listener to identify with, and be moved by, than those visually predetermined ones performed on stage. Indeed, in *The Poetics*, Aristotle (1902: 49) wrote, 'For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place'.

While Aristotle hypothesized Greek tragedy induced an emotional catharsis in viewers, this essay argues that lyrical narratives of song can serve a cathartic function in listeners. By containing the essential elements of Greek tragedy, Black Sabbath's early hit songs may well serve a therapeutic function for listeners, thus contributing to the band's success. Also, when considering Black Sabbath's influence on other artists within the heavy metal genre, future studies may want to examine the extent to which other heavy metal lyrical narratives contain the basic elements of Greek tragedy. If the basic elements of tragedy frequently occur in heavy metal songs throughout the decades, then the genre may well have served a therapeutic role for members of its listening community.

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